

FREEMAN KENNETT DPZ 2013

FINAL: 11/14/2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY &
IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM
THE MASTER PLAN

IGNITE

HIGH POINT

IGNITE HIGH POINT

CHARETTE TEAM

MAY 7-15, 2013

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We thank the residents, merchants, elected officials for their advice, and especially the City Manager Strib Boynton, and Nido Qubein, the President of High Point University, as well as Aaron Clinard and Wendy Fuscoe of The City Project, they trusted this process and on them the leadership for its implementation will rest.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Summary of the Logic of the Ignite High Point Initiative

A primary assignment of Ignite High Point involved the revitalization of North Main Street, with its epicenter at the J.H. Adams Inn. **Uptowne is the key node along this development corridor that links two major destinations and regional economic engines: Downtown/ Market District and, eastward along Lexington Avenue, High Point University.** In the charrette process, and upon personal observation of Market, the planning team concluded that the problems and possibilities of High Point were more expansive. As a result, a good number of projects and initiatives were added to this report (with no request of additional fees). The ingenuity and entrepreneurial skill that the City of High Point has long demonstrated in establishing an international brand, and that today is being matched by the leadership of High Point University, inspire great confidence that these proposals can and will succeed.

Like all urban plans associated with old places like High Point, this one must be complex: a heterogeneous mixture of large and small projects and policies. These are presented separately in this report. It is necessary that the underlying logic be understood.

1. For six decades American culture and the planning and zoning policies of High Point have encouraged suburban sprawl. This has weakened the Downtown/ Market District.
2. In the past decade High Point has lost the furniture and textile manufacturing that was the basis of its economy. This has further weakened the downtown — as well as the entire city.
3. The consequences of sprawl and the loss of a manufacturing base are problems common to American cities. Warning: They are two of the three ingredients that have driven Detroit to its present bankruptcy.
4. The third ingredient present in Detroit is the incompetence of leadership, but this is absent in High Point. Fortunately, **the governmental and civic leadership of High Point is competent and committed.** Indeed they are alert in good time to the consequences of economic loss. The Ignite High Point initiative has evolved to address this problem.
5. But there are other problems, unique to High Point, that would impede the revitalization of its downtown. One is that the residents of its suburbs are attracted to the revitalized downtowns of Greensboro and Winston Salem, both of which have impressively revitalized downtowns, and both of which are closer to the High Point suburbanites who have grown accustomed to using them. The downtown of High Point cannot compete with them on comparable terms. The ignition of High Point must be based on ideas other than revitalized main streets. That market is saturated.
6. Another, related, problem that is unique to High Point is the dependence on the International Home Furnishings Market (the Market), which causes three problems:
 - a. It provides too much of the city's taxes, which could suddenly disappear if Market were sold to the competition in competitor cities. Such an event could occur without adequate warning to develop a substitute tax base. **Therefore, a diversified economy is priority.**
 - b. Market operates only two weeks a year, causing spikes in activity that make it impossible for conventional commerce to survive (see Illustration A).
 - c. Most of the storefronts and parking lots remain in hibernation — aside from its two weeks of events. They are kept well maintained (this is

not Detroit), but the paradox is that although the commercial space downtown is closed, it is unavailable for revitalization by Ignite High Point. This is a consternating situation.

7. Because the downtown is well funded by the tax base of Market, it is a beautifully maintained civic space. Maintenance and regulatory staff of the city are also well funded. This has fostered the illusion in various City departments that permitting protocols and rules for development can be maintained at a very high level — as if the downtown were desirable and real estate values high enough to yield a profit, when, in fact, it is not. This is an additional reason that so little redevelopment occurs. This must be recalibrated to ease the threshold of renovation and business incubation reflecting the reality.
8. **The two sources of energy that could ignite renovation and incubation are both based on higher education. Foremost among them is the spectacular rise of High Point University over the past decade** — demonstrating what can be achieved with local funding in combination with vision and leadership. The can-do spirit of High Point is largely derived from the performance of this university. **The second source is the 330,000 college students located within a 75-minute drive of High Point.** Some of these students, graduating at a rate of 50,000 per year, could be drawn to High Point to incubate businesses. It is this demographic segment that has pioneered such downtowns as **they** have been revitalized.
9. However, the aforementioned planning protocol (Point 7) does not permit this group to act. Given the hurdles that High Point places on these activities this group is prevented from incubating or renovating businesses; they do not have the funding or know-how with which to navigate the process. And those who do, are not compensated because real estate values are not high enough to justify the investment in time and money.
10. Because the downtown spaces are committed to Market, most of the incubating activity must take place on the parking lots – the “White” high rise (on High and Main, formerly the Culp building) – and, above all, the near-empty Oak Hollow Mall. These and other projects are described in this report.
11. Government, regulators, and the leadership at High Point University could work collectively to establish a situation where young and energetic recent graduates would think of settling in High Point. Both the downtown and the prospect of Oak Hollow Mall will require special protocols. Among them is the proposed “Pink Code” — an innovative code that “lightens the red tape.”
12. The situation is not yet urgent, but it can quickly become so if the tax base recedes with the withdrawal of Market. There is a compelling need to return to the state of mind that allowed High Point to incubate its original manufacturing economy a century ago. This will require unity, managerial competence, and forward thinking. The flexibility and managerial competence that allows High Point to house, feed, and transport a doubling of the population is evidence that it can be done.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

Futuristic Thinking

You want, I think, your planners to be futurists. The present provides evidence, but it is also a distortion-field. It is necessary to extrapolate and think about what the 21st century will be like because **it is in the future that what is proposed today comes into reality.**

No doubt it is going to be a challenging time. The habits we have acquired as a result of the accumulated wealth at the end of the 20th century must be altered to our new impoverished circumstances. We all know about the three overlaid crises: the real estate bubble, the consciousness of climate change, and peak oil, meaning that energy will never be cheap again.

The tremendous advantages of America, the endless supply of land, which we transformed to wealth, (assuming, of course, that everyone will have a car to drive everywhere for anything). This is now becoming a disadvantage, and constrained little Europe is now more efficient.

American cities resemble each other. High Point shares these generally profligate auto-dependent characteristics – but in one way it is unique: Market. The commitment to an industry for a hundred years is a great achievement that has created generations of jobs and made the city world-famous. But this position is now in decline. The competition is arising everywhere – in the U.S., Middle East, Europe, and Asia.

By and for Young People

One set of recommendations in this report are set against a backdrop of the sweeping changes that are affecting our country and the world. If this plan and its way of implementation are not recognizable to you, it is because **we are designing with young people and for young people. This plan is all about making High Point commercially viable and socially alive in a different way than you have done in the past.**

High Point no longer keeps its young people. They are not currently involved with High Point and it is

not their fault. There isn't much to do – short or long term.

The Charrettes

To keep that magnificent dinosaur that is **Market viable** for the coming **decades**. It will need young, sharp entrepreneurs – the equivalent of tiny mammals which replaced them – together they form the biomass equivalent of the dinosaur but they can forage independently.

Such ideas grew out of the give and take process that was the charrette. There was a lot of energy and many people and their opinions. We listened, and anything that had a chance, we brought to life. You will see an assembly building and a transit line that we would not have predicted and some ideas we ignored. There is enough to do within the bounds of downtown, and some of what we heard has to be relegated to another time and another plan.

Market and High Point University

Downtown is dominated by the monoculture that is the Market. The spikes you experience during the twice-yearly Market are too important. The only other pole of first-rate activity is High Point University. Both make you unique (Illustration A).

The Market is very good for the tax base. However, it is terrible for urban vitality at all other times. There are high-capacity buildings to be available during Market that the rest of the time are closed but not dead – so that we can't rehabilitate them – they are in hibernation. This is extraordinary: the downtown looks dead but the storefronts are being paid for.

The two spikes of Market have taught you to staff up enormously, and then down to practically nothing. The fact that you can serve, transport, house and feed 80,000 people – in effect doubling your population – suggest something to exploit: you are logistical geniuses. The software in this town in terms of organization, formal and informal, can

propel the successional implementation of this plan.

And apart from the logistical genius there is another asset. You also have an enormous number of parking lots that are not being used. Buildings are closed and locked but there are sites with pre-fab footings and drainage.

So...these are the major ingredients we had to work with: the goodwill of two institutions: High Point University and Market, parking lots, and management genius. Later, we realized that the City Manager and his staff were fully capable and willing to implement what this report recommends.

Spikes

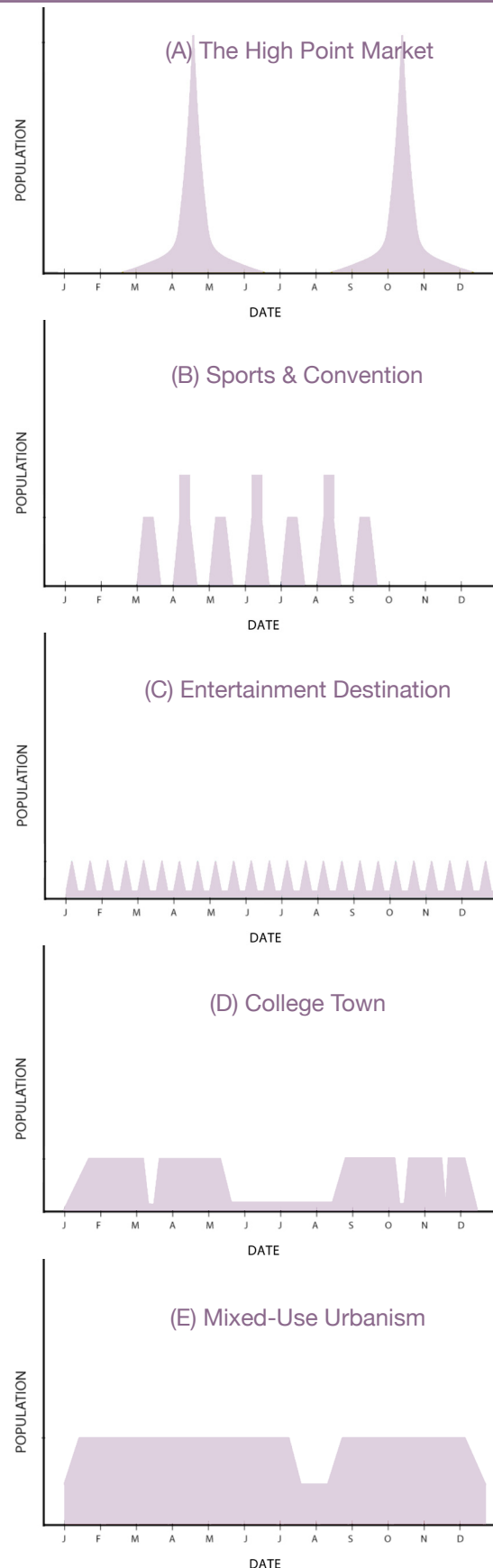
A word about spikes: I don't think there is another place that only has two gigantic conventions a year. So it is virtually impossible for commerce to thrive downtown under your current conditions.

Spikes are the opposite of solutions for dying cities. The events must be evened out. For example, see Illustration B for what would happen with a baseball field. It is not enough. Another is to promote movies (C). This isn't too bad. The spikes begin to even out.

Universities create a better pattern of spikes (D). Unfortunately students have vacations so it's still hard for businesses to survive. The businesses who feed and support the students have a difficult time. But they help if the students would come downtown.

The downtown was not the contracted focus of this plan. Most of the year, High Point, as a city, doesn't work without it. Your downtown is empty. Most empty downtowns are decrepit. You've seen the pictures of Detroit for example – which is empty and falling apart. Your downtown is empty – yet impeccably maintained.

To enliven your downtown year-round you need mixed-use (E). This is possible for two reasons. The young and the old want – or need – walkable places. Commerce survives when people live, work, shop, and amuse themselves downtown.



▲ Illustration A: Town Population

There is no other way known.

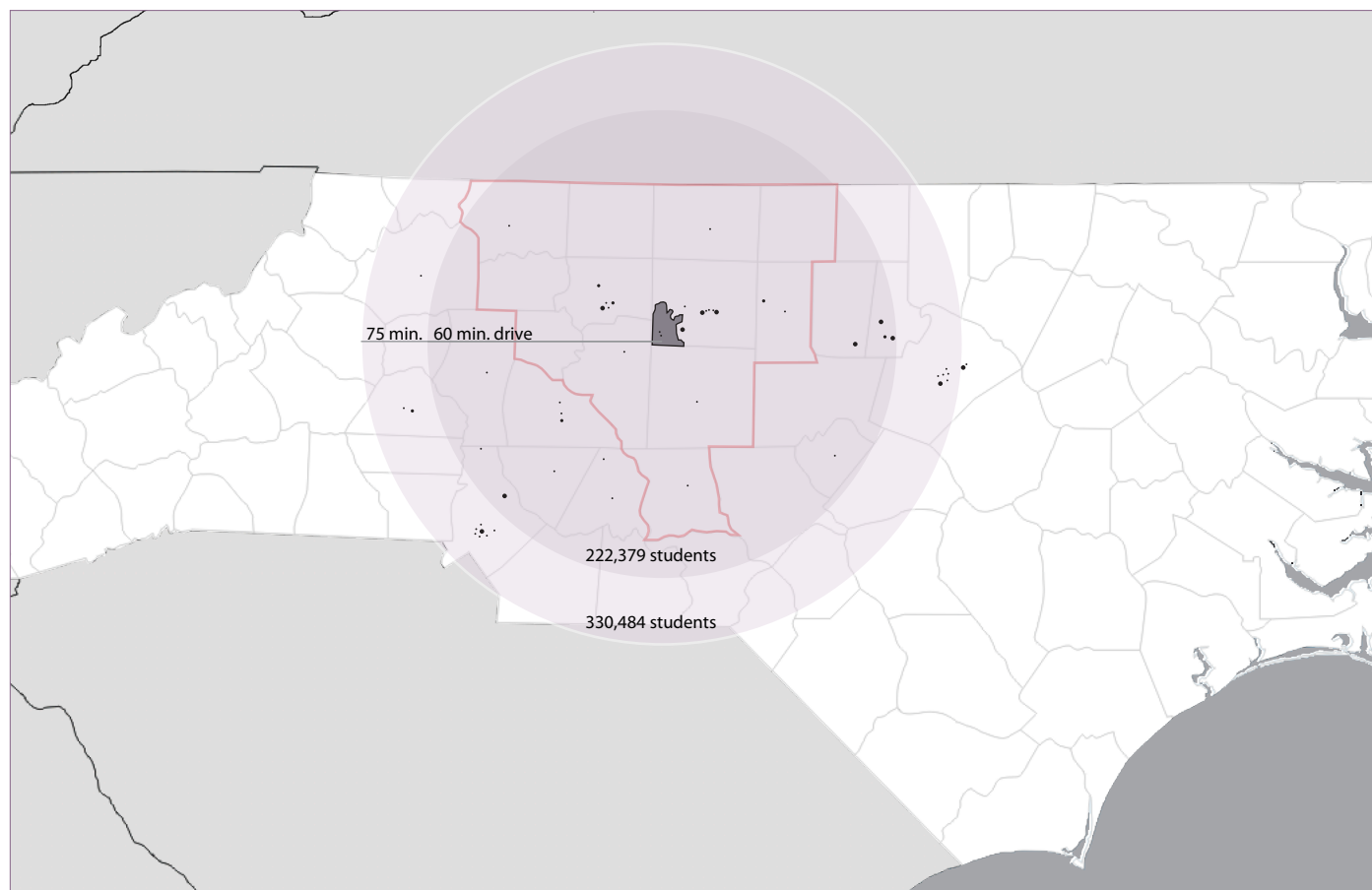
How to accomplish this in High Point? The great news is that you are well located. You know this as one of the reasons why the Market survives. High Point is at the center of the East Coast. They can charm them in competitor cities, but you still have the tremendous radius – furniture is bulky and expensive to transport. So, in addition to your tradition for manufacturing, originating with the native woods, the location was important. And it still is for another reason: There is a hinterland of youth in quantity.

The Students

Within a 60-minute drive there are 225,000 students, and within a 75-minute drive there are 335,000. (See Illustration B.) Beyond High Point University, you have dozens of other colleges nearby.

Students will drive the distance if you can keep them occupied between two and four hours. This plan counts on that. For example, the empty lot across High Avenue from the Train Depot downtown, known as The Pit, is one proposal to that seeks to establish a venue for parties. The improvised nature of this gathering spot, on seemingly forgotten land amidst parking structures, is so unlikely that it immediately establishes this place as cool – in a way that Greensboro and Winston Salem are not.

But right now none of them are driving here to know about High Point while they are in school, let alone staying after they graduate. Then, more important, about 50,000 of those students graduate each year. What can we do to keep them? They are asking, “What next?” The plan is to make this the place where they come.



▲ Illustration B: Nearby Colleges

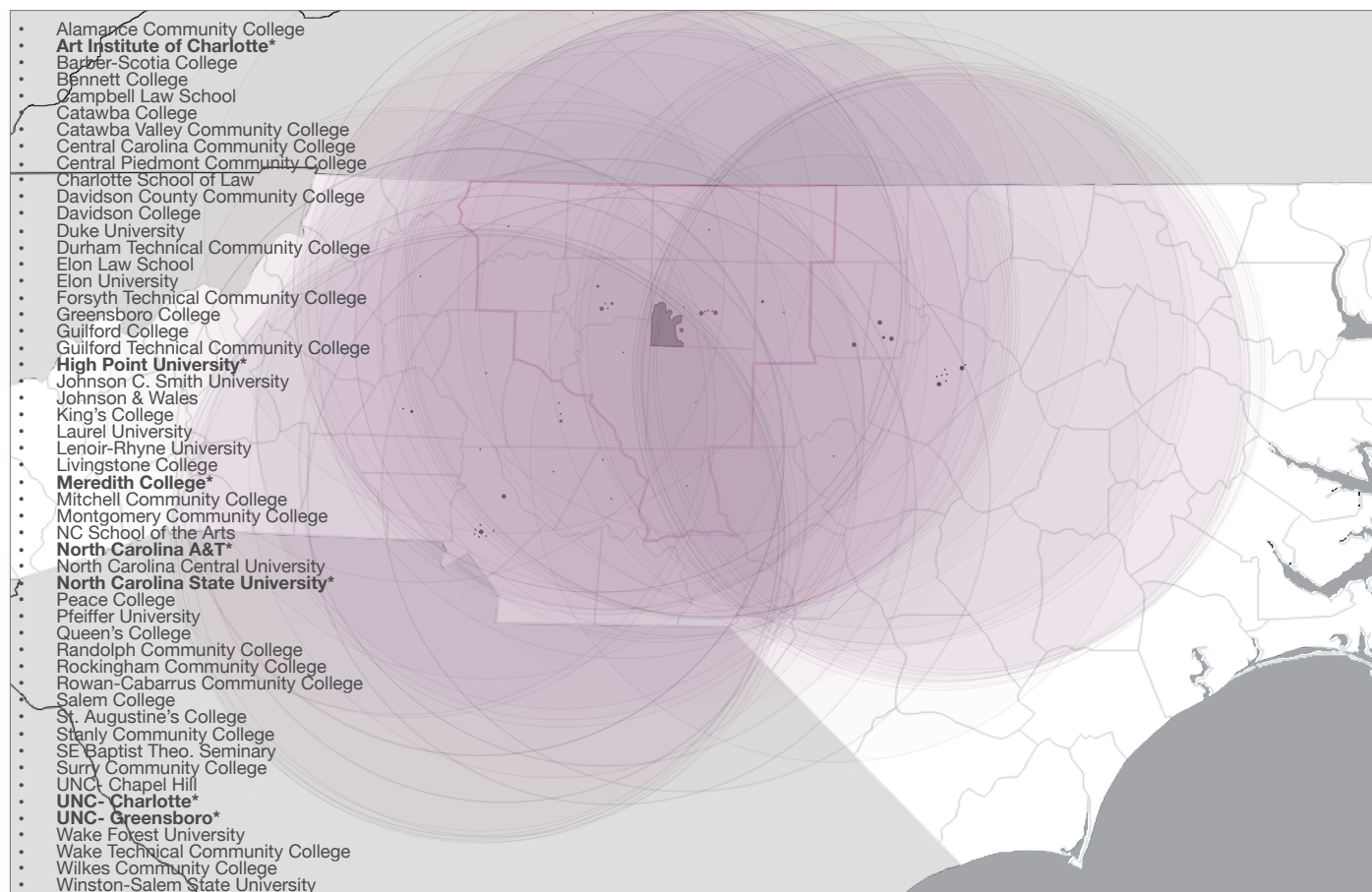
The Prospects

About the prospects for downtown: You have sprawled city, with people living to the north who have no relationship to downtown. They belong just as surely to Greensboro or Winston Salem or to the mall as they do to High Point. Yet, it is becoming clear now that sprawl doesn't have a future – for any generation. It serves neither youth nor the aging population. The aging folk at some point stop driving and they can't live in their suburban houses. They need walkability. The young people who grew up there think that suburbia is uncool. They too want to be downtown. Fewer young people are getting driver's licenses. High Point is for young people who like downtown then we have our work cut out.

Cheap Real Estate, Less Regulation

Young people have a good eye and they have low-cost needs, because they have little money. What

they need is cheap real estate. From Henry Ford onwards, things start with cheap real estate, which used to be readily available. From the left bank of Paris in 1870 to SoHo in the 1970s, suburban places become cool by having young people bypass the regulations, as they can't renovate to code. What has happened since 1970 was a surge of bureaucracy that made it impossible for them to incubate businesses and housing. Young people find starting any kind of business difficult. They can't cook and sell anything without a permit, they can't repair anything, and they can't build. No wonder half the kids are driven to be artists. It's the only thing they can do without a permit or a license. But how much art can people buy? The onerous process of bureaucratic approval cannot be amortized by the small developer with the meager value of what the downtown is originally worth, so today everything is done by bigger developers.



▲ Illustration C: High Point is at the center of an intensely creative college crowd. The design schools nearby, with interior design and architecture departments, are shown in bold. Circles signify a 75 minute drive from each school.

The Pink Code

So, only those places that have a light touch on the bureaucracy are going to succeed. That is why kids are flocking to Detroit. We propose to pioneer this lighter process in High Point. Your City Manager is ready to get ahead of this curve to make this the coolest place for young people to come and stay. This report is in fact an example of the new thinking. It is pretty thin and clear about what needs to be done for each of the projects. It is not one to stay on the shelf.

The sites we engaged allow us to address each one of these potentials. For this we propose a “Pink Code” to lighten the red tape. A code should be part of the solution.

There are no silver bullets – just healing the pedestrian experience so that over time as the buildings get replaced. The pedestrian experience gradually becomes better and better. This code has that intention. It is a code that knows what the city wants to be, so that it thereby becomes thin. A fat, unwieldy code, that is a code that hedges the bets. It is for a leadership and a profession that is scared to decide. (But it makes the consultants happy because they can only be interpreted by lawyers or architects.)

The High Point Spirit

This is the spirit that built this place. I saw the photographs of your grandparents who in months built their houses and in years they built their factories and trained a labor force out of nothing. They had nothing. But High Point grew.

Nothing prevents this but your regulators getting out of your way. The young people who came to see us are feverish with getting on with it. They see the potential – and in any case, *There is no Plan B* for High Point.

You must revert to that condition that created High Point in the first place, when it was easy to do things. So this is not a big plan. Nothing is costly. Nothing is dramatic. But it is very ambitious in terms of outcome of the kind that makes sense in the 21st century. Can it hap-

pen today? Just look at the amazing progress at High Point University – in only six years. That is the spirit you need for the downtown.

Uptowne: the catalyst

Speaking of the grandparents, there still remains a stretch of Main Street in Uptowne that retains a substantial concentration of historically significant architecture between the Library and Lexington Avenue that is a built legacy, an asset to be cherished, polished, and leveraged. These structures are at the heart of a vibrant and beautiful residential district with a roster of creative merchants and restaurateurs. It is a centrally positioned stretch of Main Street that offers High Point a superb opportunity to create both a local and regional destination for shopping and dining. A bed and breakfast is already in place and there is a service alley behind the businesses along the east side. What is needed to help encourage sensitive infill along this thoroughfare are wider sidewalks, regular street plantings, and on-street parking. **A more pedestrian and shopper friendly Uptowne streetscape, initially at the crossroad at Main and Farriss Avenue, would provide a first rate urban experience and serve as a powerful catalyst for future redevelopment southward to the downtown and eastward to HPU. The Farriss Crossroad is the starting point, the low-hanging fruit, that will catalyze this transformation.**

Future development around the Lexington Avenue intersection, the Gateway, and then eventually northward to State Avenue and around Welborn St., could build on the existing success of the substantial retail and food service activity in the area and become an extension of the more pedestrian-oriented street frontage around a revised Farriss Crossroad. Though presently very auto-oriented, the area to the north of the Gateway offers tremendous potential in helping Uptowne achieve a more sustainable balance of residential, workplace, retail and civic uses-- a goal for any walkable neighborhood.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITY LIST

This list attempts to organize the 14 proposed projects in a recommended order of implementation. The projects represent enhancements to the public realm of High Point via the act of placemaking for the purpose of fostering greater civic interaction. These are the sparks intended to “ignite” the City’s renewal. Many of these initiatives feed off each other

and need to proceed simultaneously. Some need to precede others, as they are catalytic interventions intended to enable subsequent proposals that are more costly or more complicated to implement. So while not necessarily a “carved in stone” sequence, the list presents a logical, natural progression.

1. NORTH MAIN STREET ROAD DIET: Detailed on page 105 in the Transportation chapter, the road diet is the key to making the Uptowne stretch of Main Street a more walkable environment for residents, shoppers, and visitors.

2. A2 LIBRARY SQUARE: The creation of this new public gathering space at the heart of the City as one of Ignite High Point’s first offerings boldly supports the aspiration and commitment by civic facilities to be both functional and beautiful.

3. B3 THE PIT: The epicenter of downtown, tactical “cool”, The Pit celebrates the spirit of High Point’s creative younger generation.

4. A1 FARRISS CROSSROADS: In concert with The Library Square and the N. Main Road Diet, this pivotal intersection represents the Uptowne neighborhood’s center.

5. B1 KIVETT CAFES: These pop-up businesses can begin as lunchtime and special event cafes and shops, and gradually become fixtures in High Point’s night scene.

6. C1 INC. PAD: The incorporation of business incubators at the mall can proceed per the University’s timetable and comfort level, but they could be simply commence as a seacan installation in the parking lot.

7. B4.1 MARKET SQUARE: An important Civic gesture much like the Library Square, this new space formalizes what is already an existing Market week venue as a visible, year-round, multipurpose public green.

8. B4.3 COMMERCE AVENUE: Another important Market week venue, the enhancing of this thoroughfare provides a year-round amenity that completes a pedestrian loop connecting back to The Pit and High Avenue.

9. A3 LEXINGTON GATEWAY: This third step in the Uptowne transformation marks an important regional transit hub that is also the City’s ceremonial northern entrance.

10. B2 PLAYTOWN: This project is the heart of the family activity node that will help support the Kivett Cafes and other downtown businesses.

11. B4.4 AMPHITHEATER: A formal open-air gathering spot, this project would be home to more structured daytime and early evening events complementing the informality and late-night nature of The Pit.

12. B4.2 AUDITORIUM: Though depicted in this report as a potential seacan installation, this facility would be the eventual grander, covered downtown venue for public/civic gatherings and sporting events.

13. A4 WELBORN: This North Main redevelopment would be the ultimate capstone for Uptowne’s urban rebirth as a more complete, walkable, mixed-used neighborhood.

14. C2 (UNIVERSITY) VILLAGE: A long-range project, this infill proposal points the way to creating an visible HPU neighborhood center at the key intersection of Centennial Street and Lexington Avenue.

GENERAL NOTE: The *Urgency* rating grades meaningful interventions with regard to their relative ease of implementation in the short term. The *Importance* rating evaluates a project's depth of effect in the long term.

PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>A1 UPTOWNE: FARRISS CROSSROAD</div>		Implementation is to be done by The City Project, City of High Point, private developers, and owners.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>A2 UPTOWNE: LIBRARY SQUARE</div>		Implementation is to be done by The City Project and City of High Point.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>A3 UPTOWNE: LEXINGTON GATEWAY</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by The City Project with private developers and owners.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>A4 UPTOWNE: WELBORN AREA</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by The City Project with private developers and owners.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>B1 DOWNTOWN: KIVETT CAFES</div>		Implementation is to be done by the City of High Point, The City Project, private developers, and owners.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>B2 DOWNTOWN: PLAYTOWN</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by The City Project with private developers and owners.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			
PROJECT		NOTES	
<div>B3 DOWNTOWN: THE PIT</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by The City Project and The City of High Point.	
RATING	HIGHER LOWER		
URGENCY			
IMPORTANCE			
COST EFFECTIVENESS			

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>B4.1 DOWNTOWN: MARKET SQUARE</div>		Implementation by The City Project, City of High Point, private developers, and owners.
RATING		
URGENCY	<div><div></div></div>	
IMPORTANCE	<div><div></div></div>	
COST EFFECTIVENESS	<div><div></div></div>	

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>B4.2 DOWNTOWN: AUDITORIUM</div>		Implemented by The City Project, City of High Point, private developers, and owners.
RATING	HIGHER	LOWER
URGENCY	<div></div>	
IMPORTANCE	<div></div>	
COST EFFECTIVENESS	<div></div>	

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>B4.3 DOWNTOWN: COMMERCE AVENUE</div>		Implementation by The City Project, City of High Point, private developers, and owners.
RATING		
URGENCY	<div><div></div></div>	
IMPORTANCE	<div><div></div></div>	
COST EFFECTIVENESS	<div><div></div></div>	

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>B4.4 DOWNTOWN: AMPHITHEATER</div>		Implementation by The City Project, City of High Point, private developers, and owners.
RATING	<div><div>HIGHER</div><div>LOWER</div></div>	
URGENCY	<div><div></div></div>	
IMPORTANCE	<div><div></div></div>	
COST EFFECTIVENESS	<div><div></div></div>	

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>C1 UNIVERSITY: INC.PAD</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by High Point University, private developers, and the City of High Point.
RATING	HIGHER	LOWER
URGENCY		
IMPORTANCE		
COST EFFECTIVENESS		

PROJECT		NOTES
<div>C2 UNIVERSITY: VILLAGE</div>		Implementation is to be coordinated by High Point University, private developers, and owners.
RATING	HIGHER	LOWER
URGENCY		
IMPORTANCE		
COST EFFECTIVENESS		

